



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

WHY THE CHILDREN ARE IN THE FACTORY

BY MISS JEAN M. GORDON,
Factory Inspector, Louisiana.

It seems incredible that, in this age, it should be necessary for men and women to leave their homes and private businesses, to come together to devise ways and means to awaken the consciences of other men and women, and make them feel their responsibility towards little children.

George Eliot conveys the idea somewhere in her writings, if one is sitting in a room and sees a piece of bric-a-brac about to fall, instinctively the hand is put forth to try to catch it. And it does seem that every one would put forth a hand to save the little ones; but that this is not done is evidenced by the gathering of these men and women in Atlanta to-day to try to solve this vexing, disheartening problem.

The most potent reason, in my opinion, why the children are in the factory is our school system. . Our present method of instruction, particularly for the boys between eight and twelve, does not interest the children. This is due to two causes: the overcrowded condition of the school rooms, especially in the middle grades, which makes it impossible for the teacher to give personal attention to the less intelligent children, and the alarming number of our children who are defective in sight, hearing, or what is even more prevalent and distressing, the debilitating effects of the adenoid growth, which saps the vitality and acquiring power to an incredible degree.

These defective children soon fall behind in their studies—the teacher has not the time to give them any personal attention or encouragement. They become discouraged and wish to leave school. The teacher sees the standard of her year's work greatly lowered through these so-called stupid children, and she encourages the little ones to leave. You must not blame the teacher, rather blame the niggardly appropriations and the lack of a true appreciation of the great value of education as demonstrated by our Southern law-makers on this question of education.

Demand for Education

Tell me the South is too poor to educate her children and I tell you we are too poor *not* to educate them. If we are poor, it is because we have been ignorant—ignorant of the value of our great forests and streams, our mines and franchises which we sold to Northern capital. The South must have compulsory industrial education and have it now,—not ten years hence when the boy and girl of to-day have gotten away from us. If need be, stop every other improvement, such as paving and building magnificent court and jail houses. You do not need fine school buildings. Some of the finest men and women this country has ever known were educated in log-cabins. Above all, you want the teacher who has been taught how to teach, who feels her responsibility towards the piece of putty placed in her hands. It is the teacher who will make this America of ours what it should be, not the business man nor the politician.

In Wyoming, one of the states where women are just as good as men on election day, the state has said there shall be no such thing as ignorance—it is too costly; therefore, if there is one child on a mountain top too far from the district school to attend regularly, a teacher is sent to live in the home of that child for ten months, and is paid for the entire twelve months. The state recognizes the right of the child to an education, and of the teacher to a living wage. In the South, we expect a woman to go into a state of coma two or three months of each year, as we pay only for the months she actually works.

And here let me sound my note of warning to those of us who fear that under compulsory education laws the negro child will be educated. As far as my experience goes, I have yet to find a Jew or a negro child in a mill, factory or department store. They are at school, well nourished, playing out in our glorious Southern sunlight, waxing strong and fat; it is only your white-faced, sunken-chested, curved-backed little Christians who are in the mills and department stores.

The public school system must become an adjunct to the home—it must help the busy housewife, who no longer has a yard for her children to play in, but must turn them into the streets while she fulfils the many duties of the position she holds as wife,

mother, housemaid, cook, laundress, seamstress, nurse. This busy woman has a hard time keeping up with the boy or girl of ten or twelve, who, filled with the spirit natural to childhood, wants to be "doing something." The average mother fears the influences of the street and so consents to the child's entering the factory, thinking he is safer within its four walls. Never was there a greater mistake, for all the objections which can be urged against the street,—bad companionship, dust, bad language and disease—prevail in the factory, with the added nervous strain of the work and the constant standing from ten to twelve hours each day. Therefore, our schools must arrange for the defective child, the backward child and the saddest of all children, the child of parents who have not yet learned the value of education! By diversified work, directed play and proper supervision, the school must help the mother raise her child.

If the churches of this country really wish to be a vivifying, dynamic force in our daily life, they must awaken to the fact that they have not taken their share in the great humanitarian movements of the day. These have grown up outside the church. The ministers and church men and women must make their religion work—they cannot afford to keep it as they do their best clothes, only to be used on Sunday. The mill woman who knows she is overworked and underpaid is not apt to feel kindly towards a religion which preaches justice and equality for all, when she sees the men and women who fatten off her day's labors exalted to the high places.

Parental Responsibility

Another reason why the children are at work is the independence which comes, especially to the boy, from the possession of what seems to them a great deal of money, and also the freedom from home surveillance.

I put one boy of nine years out of a department store, whose mother told me he left home at 6.30 a. m., on a breakfast of coffee and bread, taking with him a half loaf of bread for his lunch and a nickel with which he bought a cup of coffee at a bar-room. As he lived too far from the night-school to return home for dinner, he played with other boys similarly situated, until eight o'clock, when they went to school, reaching home at ten o'clock. Think of a child away from home nearly sixteen hours a day—away from all home influence, all parental control! We do much talking about home influence but we do very little work towards securing it.

The boys, also, use the excuse of going to night-school as a cover to their prowling around the haunts of vice and sin in our large cities. Night-schools for children under sixteen years of age should be forbidden by law. I have no patience with any system of economics, or civilization, or Christianity, which permits to exist a condition which deprives a boy or girl of the inalienable right of an American subject, the right to a free, day-light education! There is no more pitiful sight than a lot of tired little brains and bodies bending over spelling books and sums, when they should be in bed.

The United States Supreme Court has just decided by unanimous vote, that the states have the right to legislate in favor of women and children as to their working hours, because woman is the race, and without strong, capable mothers the race becomes decadent. What chance for proper motherhood has the girl of fourteen who starts working in a factory, knowing nothing of the duties of home-making? The knowledge of cooking and housekeeping and the care of children do not drop down upon a woman by intuition on her wedding day, and there is many a heartburn as well as burnt beefsteak and soggy potato, while she learns these essentials, which should have been part of her public school education.

Ignorant parents, knowing nothing of the value of education, constitute another strong factor in accounting for the children who are in the mills. They see only that silver dollar which Dr. Adler said we have all gazed at so long and steadily that it has hypnotized us. They do not appreciate the evil effects upon the child. Out of five hundred homes visited last summer, in only five did I find it necessary or wise to pay the wage of which I had deprived the family by putting the child out of the factory. Back of nearly every child at work is a lazy, shiftless father or an incompetent mother.

The Demand for Cheap Labor

Of course, the desire of the manufacturer for cheap labor is a great incentive to the employment of children. Despite their oft-repeated statement that child labor is unprofitable, they continue to drag-net every city, town and hillside for workers. I have never been able to decide why they turn their mills into eleemosynary institutions, unless it be the same spirit which makes them insist that the healthiest occupation in the world for a young child is work in

a cotton mill. I have been tempted, after listening to the great advantages of a dust-laden, noisy, ten-to-twelve-hour work-day, to put a sign on our mills saying, "Come all ye weary mothers, bring your fretful, restless babies; here is a restful, quiet, clean, sweet atmosphere, and plenty of sunshine, with which we promise to cure any and all ills!"

I know it will surprise many to learn that the installment system is a large factor in the early employment of children. In gathering this item of knowledge, the value of the woman as an inspector was impressed upon me, for the woman factory inspector notices the household furnishings and can go into the kitchen or wash-shed if need be. Many a child is working to pay the weekly installment of \$2.50 on the piano, or the fifty cents on the green plush album or the matting with big, pink roses splashed all over it. No one approves more than I of sweet, attractive homes, and the refining influences of music, but it is paying a heavy price for these little elegancies when the future of a child is weighed against the possession of a green album. The whole principle of child labor is such an extravagant one, I marvel that the great practical American people have permitted it to continue, from a purely commercial standpoint. It is certainly a poor business policy which permits a firm or corporation to get seven or eight years' work out of a child and then turn him out upon the community, to be cared for at public expense through long years of invalidism or criminality. As long as we sit passively, content with present conditions, our civilization will remain a travesty, our much-vaunted prosperity a rebuke, and our Christianity a mockery.